

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff,

v.

Civil Action No. 1:24-cv-58

\$71,781.07 IN FUNDS FROM FIDELITY
INVESTMENTS ACCOUNT XXX-XXX807
HELD IN THE NAME OF ANTHONY M.
PALMER,

Defendant.

VERIFIED COMPLAINT FOR FORFEITURE

AND NOW comes the United States of America, by and through its counsel, Eric G. Olshan, United States Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania, and Jill L. Locnikar, Assistant United States Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania, and respectfully represents as follows:

1. This is a civil action *in rem* for forfeiture to the United States of \$71,781.07 in funds from Fidelity Investment account xxx-xxx807 held in the name of Anthony M. Palmer, delineated by asset identification number 23-FBI-006752 (the “Defendant Property”), pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 981(a)(1)(A).
2. Jurisdiction is predicated upon 28 U.S.C. §§ 1345 and 1355(a). Venue is proper under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1395 and 1355(b).
3. On or about March 2023, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”) initiated a mail/wire fraud and stolen property investigation based on information Zippo Manufacturing Company (“ZIPPO”) provided.

4. ZIPPO reported significant increases in missing ZIPPO lighters from international shipments originating at their Bradford, Pennsylvania facility.

5. ZIPPO conducted online product monitoring and identified eBay user “relap77” as the source that offered, for sale, large lot quantities of ZIPPO lighters which included wholesaler packaging information. These large lot quantities of ZIPPO lighters corresponded to the missing ZIPPO lighters, and they included products that were not authorized for sale in the United States and were not intended for consumer sale.

6. eBay user account “relap77” included photographs with the ZIPPO lighters which displayed ZIPPO packaging labels that are used exclusively for international distributors.

7. FBI determined that eBay user account “relap77” is assigned to A. T. Palmer. The account was established in 1999, and the account directs proceeds from eBay sales to JP Morgan Chase bank account xxxxx4007.

8. FBI determined that A. T. Palmer and his son, Anthony M. Palmer (“A. M. Palmer”) purchased ZIPPO lighters, with cash, from D.S. on multiple occasions. These lighters corresponded with the ZIPPO lighters identified as missing from the ZIPPO international shipments.

9. A. T. Palmer and his son, A. M. Palmer, sold the ZIPPO lighters for profit on eBay and the proceeds were received into JP Morgan Chase bank account xxxxx4007.

10. On March 28, 2023, FBI made a control purchase of ZIPPO lighters from eBay user “relap77”. The return address on the box delivered to the FBI identified the sender as Anthony Palmer, 326 Trumbull Drive, Niles, OH 44446. ZIPPO confirmed that the lighters in the box were among the missing items from the ZIPPO international shipment destined for a distributor in India. ZIPPO also confirmed that the stickers, tape, and markings on the package matched those used by ZIPPO and the MRPR price and instruction manual were identical with

those used for distribution in India.

11. FBI reviewed eBay records and confirmed that approximately 16,128 ZIPPO lighters were sold from July 2022 through June 2023. These lighters contained descriptions consistent with items missing from ZIPPO's international shipments, with sales proceeds totaling approximately \$185,459.50 (or approximately 58.5% of eBay sales).

12. As of February 2024, ZIPPO reported that approximately 31,031 lighters had been identified as missing from international shipments.

13. The sales period for the ZIPPO lighters paralleled the timeframe during which ZIPPO reported a significant increase in missing items.

14. On June 29, 2023, a federal search warrant was executed at A. T. Palmer's and A.M. Palmer's residence, known and numbered as 326 Trumbull Drive, Niles, Ohio 44446. During the search, law enforcement seized more than 1,400 new ZIPPO lighters in their original packaging. FBI reviewed the inventory and confirmed that the lighters displayed packaging and markings consistent with items reported missing by ZIPPO.

15. On June 29, 2023, law enforcement executed a federal seizure warrant on the Defendant Property and other accounts.

16. During the search, FBI interviewed A. T. Palmer and A. M. Palmer wherein they stated that they met D.S. at a flea market in Rodgers, Ohio and met him again in Ravenna and Streetsboro, Ohio to purchase ZIPPO lighters with cash. They then sold the ZIPPO lighters on eBay.

17. A. T. Palmer and A. M. Palmer noticed the lighters they purchased from D.S. appeared to be for foreign markets but were comfortable selling them on eBay because eBay did not flag them as stolen merchandise.

18. FBI reviewed A. T. Palmer's financial records and discovered that the funds in JP Morgan Chase bank account xxxxx4007 principally represented proceeds from A. T. Palmer and A. M. Palmer's sales of missing ZIPPO lighters. Approximately 85 percent of deposits into the JP Morgan Chase bank account xxxxx4007 from July 2022 through June 2023 were received from eBay, including the \$185,459.50 directly attributable to the sale of missing ZIPPO items.

19. A.T. Palmer told law enforcement that he was paid approximately \$150,000.00 from the sales of ZIPPO lighters he purchased from D.S.

20. FBI determined that A. T. Palmer and A.M. Palmer transferred funds to multiple accounts to separate and disguise the location of the proceeds from the stolen ZIPPO items. A. T. Palmer withdrew approximately \$124,400.00 from JP Morgan Chase bank account xxxxx4007 and deposited \$122,600.00 into the Chase Bank Account No. xxxxxx595. JP Morgan Chase account xxxxxx595 made deposits to the Fidelity account xxx-xxx807 in the amount of \$190,000 of which \$71,781.07 is attributable to the sale of missing ZIPPO lighters.

21. Subsequent to the seizure of the Defendant Property, FBI instituted administrative forfeiture proceedings against the Defendant Property. As part of the administrative proceedings, A.M. Palmer filed a claim to the Defendant Property. As a result, the United States has instituted this civil forfeiture action against the Defendant Property.

22. By reason of the foregoing, and under the provisions of 18 U.S.C. § 981(a)(1)(A), the Defendant Property is forfeitable to the United States.

WHEREFORE, the United States of America respectfully requests that process of warrant *in rem* issue for the arrest of the Defendant Property; that Judgment of Forfeiture be entered in favor of the United States for the Defendant Property; and that the United States be granted such relief as this Honorable Court may deem just and proper, together with the costs and disbursements of this action.

Respectfully submitted,


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United States Attorney

By: /s/ Jill L. Locnikar
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VERIFICATION

I am a Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the officer assigned the responsibility for this case. I have read the contents of the foregoing complaint for forfeiture and the statements contained therein are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

I verify under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed on this 23 day of February, 2024.



DIANNE E. SHAFFER, Special Agent,
Federal Bureau of Investigation